



## Position Paper on the *Awake, Sleeper* Series

by

Metropolitan Makarios of Toronto



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by  
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Empress Alexandra of Nicomedia who was martyred  
after believing in Christ through St. George (+296)

*Thy knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is mighty, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? And from Thy presence whither shall I flee? If I go up into heaven, Thou art there; if I go down into hades, Thou art present there. If I take up my wings toward the dawn, and make mine abode in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand guide me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.*

*Psalm 138:5-10*

In October 2010 I asked the Toronto clergy for assistance in evaluating the writings of Metropolitan Ephraim in connection with the *Awake, Sleeper* series of articles and related materials. Likewise I undertook to read through the same material, but did not conduct an exhaustive review of them at that time. Rather, I had relied upon the Toronto clergy to advise and support me in accurately assessing the relevant writings of Metropolitan Ephraim.

Subsequent to my own initial reading of the *Awake, Sleeper* articles and early discussions with the Toronto clergy, I arrived at a preliminary position not entirely favorable to Metropolitan Ephraim. As I had expressed in face-to-face conversations with the Toronto clergy, as well as certain members of the laity from the parishes, I found fault in a limited, qualified way with the writings of Metropolitan Ephraim with respect to tertiary matters not going to the substance of his work.

To be precise, I questioned the necessity and wisdom of opening up for public discussion matters, which, having been presented as a pastoral question, should have been handled with discretion, in

confidence, between Metropolitan Ephraim and individual parishioners. Moreover, I expressed doubt as to the style and manner of Metropolitan Ephraim's presentation. Because of the very real danger that his writings could be misconstrued, I stated my concern that it would have been desirable if Metropolitan Ephraim had approached his subject in a more rigorous and expository manner, in order to mitigate or avoid misunderstanding and temptation. In remarking thus, I did not intend to disparage Metropolitan Ephraim's erudition, or question his motives.

Now, let me be abundantly clear as to one over-arching point: I did not make any statements, either orally or in writing, that expressed the belief or opinion that Metropolitan Ephraim has dogmatized, or taught a new doctrine, or espoused or taught heresy. In fact, I have thus far refrained from submitting any written documents pertaining to this matter out of respect for ecclesiastical comity, and to set an example that we ought to avoid vain disputes that rend the Body of Christ.

Unfortunately, some parties and factions within our synod (and without) have fanned the flames of controversy. By escalating what began as a disagreement over Metropolitan Ephraim's writings into outright charges of heresy, they have exacerbated the problem to such an extent that we have now gone very far indeed down the road toward schism. With great sadness, I write now in order to preserve the peace and unity of the Church.

I had relied upon the Toronto clergy to shed light on the topics raised in the *Awake, Sleeper* articles as concerns the question whether or not the non-Orthodox can be saved. They did not faithfully fulfill their mandate, and rather than submitting a full and fair report to me in writing, they chose instead to unilaterally publicize a lengthy document profoundly critical of Metropolitan Ephraim. This document was not dated, signed, or given a title. It was prefaced by an invocation to the Holy Trinity, and has appended thereto the names and titles of the five priests of the Toronto parishes.

Who is everywhere present and fillest all things, will appear in His full glory for all eternity. God will not separate Himself from us, but it will be the condition of the human heart that will constitute the unfathomable abyss between man and God. For it will be the human heart that, having rejected God, will condemn itself to perdition at the Last Judgment, when the books, that is the hearts of men, shall be opened.

Unfortunately, at the Last Judgment, not even all the Orthodox will be saved, as we see in the icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent. Nonetheless, we have hope that in the Great Day of the Lord, when the Books shall be opened, our Saviour will justly reward all those whose hearts are inclined towards Him.



Although it bears no actual signatures, we can assume that the five priests claim joint authorship of this document.

I would say as a general comment that this document was out of order. It is strident and polemical in tone, as well as subtlety hostile and disrespectful to our beloved Metropolitan Ephraim, containing certain instances of sarcasm, irony and other linguistic attacks. Perhaps these are just stylistic nuances, but many who have read this document could not help but wonder if it had been written in a spirit of Christian love and humility. Furthermore, this document, if presented at all, should have been addressed privately to Metropolitan Ephraim and not published for general consumption.

This document comes to us replete with many and extensive citations from the homilies and writings of the Holy Fathers, from the writings and homilies of other Saints, and from the Holy Scriptures. Perhaps, for their effort, the authors are to be commended; I hope and pray that we shall continue to read from these sources assiduously in the future. To the extent, however, that this document seeks to categorically define and explicate the “Mind of the Church” and thereby confound and refute Metropolitan Ephraim, it is not successful.

This document fails to measure up chiefly because it employs faulty methodology. It assumes, without justification, that there is a hierarchy of Orthodox sources upon which we can rely to determine the “Mind of the Church.” It classifies them into greater and lesser rank by supposed authority and weight. Only certain texts of the authors’ choosing (i.e., the Fathers of the Church), but only derived from sources deemed authentic by their undisclosed criteria; and the Canonical Scriptures) are accorded the greatest importance and significance. Other Orthodox sources, such as Lives of the Saints, the prayers and hymns of the Church, the Holy Traditions of the Church, and the Holy Icons either receive scant attention or are assigned a lesser value as being somehow suspicious. In fact, in some instances, the essential validity of these sources are openly called into

question, belittled, and derided in order to undermine their significance.

Contrary to the suppositions underlying their critique, the Orthodox Church accepts all of these sources equally: Written, Sacred Scriptures; writings and recorded homilies of the Church Fathers, Theologians, and other Saints, including martyrs, hierarchs, and monastics; the Divine Services, Hymns, and Prayers of the Church; the Holy Icons; and Holy Tradition. (I do not present them by rank, nor do I propose an exclusive list, but this is broad enough to suffice for our purposes.) All of these sources, especially when they mutually corroborate one another and are incorporated together, comprise the foundation upon which we may build our understanding of the “Mind of the Church.” Whenever we deviate from this understanding we easily fall into the related errors of Scholasticism and Protestantism that compelled the West into theological catastrophe.

This document also fails because it employs specious and disingenuous rhetorical devices that do not enlighten but only confuse the reader. In this respect the authors of this document attempt to set the Saints at variance to themselves, as it were. Thus for example, Metropolitan Ephraim cites St. John of Damascus. In response, the authors of this document, finding Metropolitan Ephraim’s reliance on St. John untenable, seek to undermine the authenticity of his source by insinuating that it is somehow corrupt or fraudulent in origin. Likewise, where Metropolitan Ephraim recounts an event from the life of St. Gregory the Great, in which the Saint, through fervent intercession, moves our Saviour to release the pagan emperor Trajan from torments, the critics trivialize this account as a “little story.” They then introduce a homily by St. Gregory the Great on the Leviathan, as if to prove the Saint could never have prayed in such a manner for Trajan. Such debating tactics are used to expedite their arguments, but not to explicate the truth. They constitute a bucketful of red herrings, but we have other fish to fry.

of God in different measure, as one star differs from another in glory. In the Heavenly Kingdom, each will receive the grace appropriate to his spiritual state, in accordance with the disposition of his heart towards God. Likewise, outside of the Heavenly Kingdom, we see the possibility that consolations will be granted to such virtuous persons as have followed the natural law of their conscience, but who were never united to the Orthodox Church. While these persons are found at the Foot of Paradise, according to St. Ephraim the Syrian, they do not dwell within Paradise, and thus, while enjoying some degree of blessedness because of their proximity to Paradise, do not participate in the Divine nature, which is given to those within Paradise. Likewise, the souls of the wicked will suffer eternal punishment in a place far from Paradise, but also by degrees, according to their evil deeds and disposition. This understanding does not preclude the possibility that some may be united to the Church and brought into Paradise posthumously, nor does it preclude another possibility that some will be found outside of Paradise, but will not suffer the eternal torments of the damned, or that, at the very least, their sufferings will be mitigated by God’s mercy.

At the Last Judgment all mankind will be resurrected, some unto blessedness and some unto damnation. The separation at the Last Judgment between the righteous and the damned will be forever and unalterable, as the nature and disposition of each soul will remain unchanged. Yet, in the Great and Final Day of the Lord, all mankind will be found eternally in the presence of God and the fullness of His glory. The souls of the blessed who love God and are inclined to goodness will delight in His presence, whereas the souls of the damned will find themselves in a place of bitterness, of weeping and gnashing of teeth because they must now forever behold God Whom they rejected and despised. This is the outer darkness, found within the inner recesses of a heart utterly opposed to God. In some sense, the blessedness of heaven and the torments of hell are found together, as we see in the icon of the Last Judgment, for God,

steadfastly encourage all who desire salvation to be united with the Church today, without hesitation or delay. Never would we counsel against the necessity of conversion in this life, as we know it is the only path to Heaven clearly revealed to us. Moreover, it is a path that while straight and narrow, is also surrounded by our Saviour's blessings. In order to choose this way, we must take upon us our Saviour's yoke, one that is infinitely lighter than the yoke of sin.

So how then could it be even remotely possible for the non-Orthodox to be saved without the benefit of struggle and the Mysteries and grace of the Church? If salvation is difficult for Orthodox Christians, how is it possible for those outside the Church? The only honest answer is that we do not have perfect knowledge regarding this great mystery of God. In our sinfulness, we cannot pierce the veil of God's mysteries, yet we can find great insight from the writings and lives of the Saints, as well as the hymns and prayers of the Church, and Holy Tradition, that bring us to a deeper knowledge of the things of God. In this regard, while we yet look through a glass darkly because of the impurity of our hearts and the limitations of our fallen minds, the Saints, whose hearts were pure and whose minds had attained to the highest level of knowledge, enjoyed a greater understanding of Divine things. Some of the wonders they beheld, they imparted to us, if only in part; other mysteries they kept in silence. But the Saints of the Church have not been entirely silent as regards the salvation of the souls of those outside the Church, and as pertains to that time between death and the Final Judgment on the Great Day of the Lord. Metropolitan Ephraim's primary objective in writing *Awake, Sleeper* was to explicate and expound upon this knowledge given to us, in appropriate measure, by the Saints.

We find in Metropolitan Ephraim's explications the proposition that our Saviour's judgments are just, that He will reward and punish every person fairly in the Last Judgment, and that all those who participate in salvation will be endowed with the splendor and grace

By recklessly daring to undermine Orthodox sources of piety and instruction that have been accepted historically by the Church, the authors of this document place themselves on a slippery slope (or, as we find ourselves in Canada, we may say they are skating on thin ice). Should we now also revisit the authenticity of the Gospels and other Apostolic books, given that there is only one extant original full manuscript (Codex Sinaiticus) source, from the fourth century, to support such authenticity? We clearly know this is the wrong approach because we know the Canon of New Testament Scripture stands on a larger foundation. We refuse to go down this revisionist path because the legitimacy of all Orthodox sources, including the Canon of Scripture, does not depend primarily on forensic archaeology, empirical evidence, or critical hermeneutics, but derives from the witness of the Holy Spirit, enlightening the faithful, and affirmed in the "Mind of the Church."

Finally this document fails in substance to make a compelling case that Metropolitan Ephraim has taught heresy. Taken together, it presents, in recurring fashion, the proposition that the Fathers and Saints of the Church are united in their belief and teaching of the following doctrines of the Church, with which I and Metropolitan Ephraim are in complete accord:

1. That all mankind is free to accept or reject salvation.
2. That conversion and union with the Orthodox Church is a necessary prerequisite to salvation.
3. That repentance, in this life, is the only means by which sinners are restored to union with the Orthodox Church.
4. That the prayers of the Church (both the Church militant and the Church triumphant) are beneficial for the souls of the departed.
5. That in the Great and Final Day of the Lord, all the dead will be raised and all mankind will be judged, according to God's

mercy and justice, some to eternal punishment, and some to eternal blessedness.

6. That ultimately not all mankind will be saved; nor will all those who had been united with the Orthodox Church be saved, including hierarchs and clergy.

This document adequately proves these points, but does not prove anything more, especially as concerns the allegation that Metropolitan Ephraim's writings constitute a doctrine contrary to the aforementioned dogmas of the Church.

#### THAT METROPOLITAN EPHRAIM HAS NOT TAUGHT HERESY

A bishop of the Church has many roles as the shepherd of his flock: pastor, teacher, administrator, guardian of the true confession of faith, husbandman of the true vine of Christ responsible for nurturing and maintaining the peace of the Church. When a bishop speaks or writes, either publicly or privately, he does so in fulfillment of one of these many roles; frequently, but not always, these roles overlap. In the current case of Metropolitan Ephraim's writings in *Awake, Sleeper*, he was functioning in his pastoral capacity. He did not dogmatize; he did not teach *ex cathedra*; he did not promulgate a doctrine to be accepted as mandatory and binding on all the faithful. It is clear that the reader was entirely free to accept or reject his exposition and conclusions. One was not required to assent in order to remain a member of the Orthodox Church, nor was dissent to be penalized by expulsion from the Orthodox Church.

A careful reading of his work shows that Metropolitan Ephraim himself calls his writings a "point of view" and invites others to participate in open dialogue by submitting other, even contradictory points of view, provided they were not mere opinions, but well substantiated by Orthodox sources. If he had been dogmatizing, as alleged, is it conceivable that he would have issued such an invita-

the higher state of "perfect fear" that the Saints enjoy. Having attained to perfect love of God, as described by St. John Climacus in the *Ladder*, and the delight of being with God, they fear only to be deprived of God's love. Such a state is the ultimate goal of every Orthodox Christian, whether we attain to it or not, and is truly the state of salvation. Salvation, therefore, is possible through the constant struggle for moral perfection, that begins with the lowest level of obedience to God's commandments and gradually ascends to perfect love of God. As St. David the king and psalmist wrote: "Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Psalm 33:14).

For each Christian, therefore, spiritual struggle is required, aided by the grace of the Holy Spirit mediated by the Mysteries of the Church. Through struggle, or *askesis*, each Christian is able to co-operate synergistically in the process of his own salvation, worked out with fear and trembling. For Christians who diligently seek to purify themselves through *askesis*, it is done with the purpose of acquiring the grace of the Holy Spirit and the Spirit of Peace, as St. Seraphim of Sarov explains in his commentary on the parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins. For those Christians whose labors are pleasing to God, the grace of the Holy Spirit comes and abides with them, even within this life, as a foretaste of heavenly bliss, as is expounded so beautifully by St. Symeon the New Theologian. Thus, for Orthodox Christians it is possible, through perfect repentance, the war against the passions, prayer, and participation in the grace-filled mysteries and Divine Service of the Church, to enjoy the first fruits of salvation even in this immediate life. If Christians are worthy, our Saviour will not hesitate to bestow His joy upon them, nor to reveal His grace to them, according to the capacity of each to receive it. This is the state of grace granted by our Saviour when He says "Today has salvation come unto this house" and "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

This hope is one among many reasons that Orthodox Christians

without dogmatizing, that in the epoch between death and the Last Judgment, those dwelling in darkness and error will, upon beholding the light and grace of Christ's resurrection, be converted to the Truth by His Eternal and Divine *kerygma*.

Of course some may object that, at most, our Saviour's descent into Hades was a special, limited dispensation carried out by our Saviour solely to preach to and convert the souls of the righteous forefathers of the nation of Israel. We do not see how this can be so, since St. Peter specifically states that Christ preached in Hades to the souls of the formerly disobedient nations from the time of Noah. If Christ preached to this most wicked generation, it is clear that He did not descend just for the sake of the souls of the righteous. If our Saviour foresaw that none of the disobedient from among the nations would be converted, then why did He preach to them? The answer to this question lies hidden within the mystery of our salvation.

#### SALVATION, AT LAST.

The basic question that engendered the entire *Awake, Sleeper* series and the ensuing controversy was: Can the non-Orthodox be saved? Or, will the heterodox be saved? This question, of course, presupposes we know what it means to be saved. As it is always useful to return to first principles, it is worthwhile to succinctly state the Orthodox definition of salvation as *Theosis*: divinization, deification, participation in the nature, but not the essence, of God through grace.

The Orthodox definition of salvation contemplates much more than the future reward for a virtuous life or the escape from punishment at the Final Judgment. As Saint Dorotheos writes in his *Directions on the Spiritual Life*, Christians begin their struggles in the fear of the Lord, fulfilling the commandments of God as hirelings, but through spiritual progress, the way is opened for the Christian to reach a state of blessed union with God, even in this life. This is

tion? The conclusion derived from this simple fact is enough to adequately support our case.

But we will go further in showing that Metropolitan Ephraim later clarified his writings by describing them as a *theologoumenon*. For some, this term is troublesome and suspect, having been labeled as a "heretical" word, merely because it does not have an ancient origin, but is relatively modern in genesis. Are words by themselves heretical, rather than the meaning and use of these words? Are all modern Greek words heretical, and only ancient Greek words are not? Is English or German a heretical language because so much heresy has been composed in these languages? We follow the argument *reductio ad absurdum* to the point of linguistic phylitism because the original contention itself is absurd.

For those who can accept the word *theologoumenon*, it translates from Greek to English as "opinion," but not mere, unsupported opinion on secular matters offered by some unworthy or unschooled persons. But adding to its proper meaning, because it is primarily used in connection with discussions of theological matters, we define it more precisely as pious opinion, concerning issues over which the "Mind of the Church" reflects no clear consensus, and about which the Church does not dogmatize, even through silence. Here, in its proper sense, is the definition of *theologoumenon*, offered in this instance by Metropolitan Ephraim to accurately describe his pious expositions written for the edification of the faithful upon matters that are not *per se* essential doctrines of the Orthodox Faith. Such opinions, given to us by a revered hierarch of the Church, who has received grace and wisdom from the Lord, should be carefully and respectfully considered by the faithful, if not accepted and embraced by all.

Moving from *theologoumenon*, it is appropriate at this juncture to write about the nature of heresy itself. It is certainly true that heresy is heresy and need not to be formally identified as such by a synod of bishops or Church council in order to exist. By the same

token, poison is deadly even if it is not found in a bottle clearly labeled as poison. Conversely, pure water, if placed within a bottle mislabeled as poison brings no physical harm to those who drink it, yet the psychological harm may be great. Likewise, those who, in error, mis-identify as heresy that which is not heresy, behave ill-advisedly, bringing dissension within the body of Christ. It is similar to the crime of falsely setting off a fire alarm in a crowded theater, except that in the Church the result is not panic, but schism. Just as heresy knows no holiday, takes no time off, and works its evil relentlessly, so too does schism.

So what is heresy, generally defined? In the first place the term heresy comes from the latinized Greek word which means to choose the other. Heresy is a choice made contrary to or instead of another belief. In the Orthodox Church, heresy is a doctrine contrary to the divinely revealed dogmas of the Orthodox Christian Faith, once delivered to the Saints. The Church dogmatizes affirmatively and not by omission or implication. Thus the dogmas of the Church are openly and universally accepted and proclaimed. On the other hand, the Church does not dogmatize through silence, and where the Church is silent because of an incompleteness of Divine Revelation, indicated by an absence of full consensus within the “Mind of the Church,” we are not able to find a dogma.

To reiterate, heresy is a mandatory teaching that is contrary to dogma. A teaching, as we have stated, must be mandatory in terms of its authority, and as heresy must be contrary by rising to the level of that which is an innovation, either by adding to, subtracting from, altering, or essentially distorting dogma. Whereas a divinely inspired teaching or doctrine of the Church logically precedes a heresy, such heresy is thereby contingent upon doctrine and follows from it. A heresy, as a mandatory teaching, is a corruption of dogma, a contradiction to dogma, a false substitute for dogma, or an addition to dogma. When a person chooses heresy, he abandons one or all of the dogmas of the Church.

tion of the universe, that is to say, outside of time, so that timelessness is proper to it. Yet as recorded in Holy Scripture, each act and event ordained by God for the salvation of mankind occurred within time and history, as a condescension to our condition, that being found in mortal bodies on this earthly plane, we are bound by time and space.

Our salvation has been achieved within history, but more than this, it manifests the intervention of the Divine into the earthly, created, temporal realm. When our Saviour bowed the Heavens and came down to us as the Incarnate God-Man, He Who is “everywhere present and fillest all things” became united with His creation here below. Consequently, the wall between the eternal and the temporal has been removed.

Because of the conjunction of the temporal and the eternal through the Divine Incarnation, each Christian, through faith and the gace of the Holy Spirit, may participate mystically and fully in every event of our salvation. Not an imaginary participation. Not an intellectual participation. Not a commemoration. Indeed, it is a participation that is more real than any earthly reality. And it is not just the effects of these events in which they may participate, but the events together with their attendant beneficial effects. No one should infer that we mean our Saviour is crucified again and again in time, as this would be blasphemy contrary to the Apostolic teachings. What we mean is that Christians participate, again and again, in time, in these salvific, eternal events.

Just as our Saviour’s salvific acts and their beneficial effects are truly present for all Orthodox Christians in this life, so too they are not diminished in the eternal realm beyond this life. The souls of men, once separated from the body through death, enter into this eternal realm, into what is called timelessness or the unwaning day. There, in that eternal realm, there is great mystery and we do not know fully how our Saviour’s salvific acts and their effects will help the souls of the dead. But we hope for and admit the possibility,

Confessor. But we will ask: Did not St. Philaret possess the “Mind of the Church”? Did he not, being sanctified and enlightened by the Holy Spirit, understand the “Mind of the Church”? Was he not competent by virtue of his sanctity to offer divinely-inspired guidance, insight and wisdom as concerns these matters? We invite the reader to reflect on these questions and to answer in his own heart.

Saint Philaret focused on the fate of the heterodox, while Metropolitan Ephraim has written in relationship to the broadest category of non-Orthodox persons. But his conclusions are not so expansive as those of Saint Philaret. By contrast, Metropolitan Ephraim never writes that our Saviour is leading all heterodox to salvation in His own way. *More importantly*, Metropolitan Ephraim *never writes or implies* that our Saviour is leading all men to salvation. The obvious absence of such statements in Metropolitan Ephraim’s writings flies in the face of those who accuse him of being a new Origen and of teaching universal salvation. These utterly baseless allegations (like the claim that Metropolitan Ephraim chose the title “Awake, *Sleeper*” in order to deceive, when in fact he was paying homage to St. Epiphanius of Cyprus) offend the conscience of any right-thinking person.

## OUR SAVIOUR’S DESCENT INTO HADES

One major point of controversy has been the manner, the extent, and the effect of our Saviour’s descent into Hades. To wit, was our Saviour’s descent into Hades recurring or was it a unique event? This appears to be the greatest single issue upon which much disagreement is based. We believe the question is predicated upon a false dilemma, and by clinging to the limited language and categories of thought characteristic of our fallen humanity, fails to fully grasp the profound mystery of our Saviour’s Divine *Economia* of Salvation. Our Saviour’s descent into Hades, like all the events or acts of the salvific dispensation, happened in time yet is timeless in nature. Our Saviour’s plan for our salvation was established before the founda-

In whatever matter the Church has promulgated dogma, she has faced the possibility of heresy, and, in fact, throughout history she has confronted one heresy after another intended to subvert each of Her dogmas. These have been identified and defined in contradistinction to her dogmas and anathematized.

On the other hand, where the Church has not dogmatized, she does not readily concern herself with the question of heresy, except in the case of an attempt to add a new dogma to the corpus of her doctrinal truths. Thus, for example, the Orthodox Church did not speak dogmatically as to the subject of astronomy, and anathematized neither Galileo nor the heliocentric understanding of the universe he espoused (The Pope of Rome, however, did speak dogmatically, eclipsing Galileo and his theories.) We may thus think in terms of the maxim: No Dogma, No Heresy.

In this case, we reiterate that Metropolitan Ephraim has not attempted to promulgate a new dogma, nor has he sought to undermine an existing dogma concerning the posthumous fate of those outside the Orthodox Church. He has consistently maintained that there is no salvation outside of the Orthodox Church, in keeping with the Churches’ dogmas regarding soteriology. He has also said or written nothing that violates the Churches’ teachings about its visible boundaries here on earth, thus preserving our doctrinal integrity with respect to ecclesiology. Metropolitan Ephraim has addressed his writings only to the question of whether the souls of the non-Orthodox can be united to the Orthodox Church after entering, through physical death, that timeless realm that exists until the Final Day of Judgment. This is a mystery about which the Church has not dogmatized but about which some of her faithful Saints have not been entirely silent.

Those who insist otherwise have not adequately delineated the dogma that they claim has been transgressed, yet the burden rests squarely on the shoulders of Metropolitan Ephraim’s accusers to do so, and to do so properly, if they can, according to the Canons of the

Church and not by setting themselves up prejudicially as prosecutor, judge, and jury in the false courts of public opinion.

We have read and heard the oft-repeated charge that, even if he did not dogmatize in *Awake, Sleeper*, Metropolitan Ephraim has nonetheless threatened the doctrinal integrity of the Church. We concede that his writings could appear to impinge on both the ecclesiology and soteriology of the Holy Orthodox Church, but only if understood superficially and improperly. Such a false understanding is summed up in the claim frequently made by his accusers that Metropolitan Ephraim teaches that there is the possibility of *repentance after death* for those who die outside the Orthodox Church. Yet if one reads carefully and honestly through all of Metropolitan Ephraim's articles, one will come to understand that this is inconsistent with his central thesis as summarized in the following passages:

Essentially, what Saint Philaret (and the Church Fathers) say is that, in order to judge mankind fairly, our Saviour will give every person who ever lived on earth the opportunity to espouse or reject His teaching. Whether this happens while the person is still living or in Hades—whenever it happens—he or she will have the opportunity to make that choice. (*Awake, Sleeper*, p. 3).

Certainly, after death, there is no change in man's character. But here we are speaking specifically about those who had *never* heard the gospel of Christ during their lives. Christ's resurrection freed all these dead also, giving them a chance to make a choice—according to the character and virtues they had cultivated in life, according to their consciences as people who “have not the Law, but by nature do the things contained in the Law” (Rom. 2:14). This would be their opportunity, they would have the choice, at least, to express their remorse over their former idolatry and believe in and accept the true God, Christ, Who, until that moment, had been for them “the Unknown God” (*Awake, Sleeper*, p. 48).

Metropolitan Ephraim's writings in *Awake, Sleeper* both reflect and are reinforced by the brief discourse contained in Saint Philaret's article. It is telling that Saint Philaret consented to address the question whether the heterodox will be saved, given the potential for controversy such a question could raise. He examined this question not because he had been influenced by the prevalent attitudes toward religion in the West, but rather out of recognition that it had “become particularly painful and acute in our days.” It is fair to say that, even though Saint Philaret was a priest and not a bishop at the time of his writing, he responded to a clear pastoral need.

Moreover, it should be noted that Saint Philaret frames the question with respect to the heterodox, which he broadly defines to include not just sincere members of the Catholic or Protestant confessions, but more broadly the adherents of any non-Orthodox sects or confessions. He distinguishes quite clearly between “heretics” and the “heterodox,” as between those who “knowingly pervert the Truth” and those in whose life there has not been a moment of personal and conscious renunciation of Orthodoxy.

Saint Philaret holds out not one, but two answers to his readers. With respect to the heterodox he says:

“The Lord, ‘Who will have all men be saved’ (1 Tim. 2:4) and ‘Who enlightens every man born into the world’ (Jn. 1:9), undoubtedly is leading them also towards salvation in His own way.”

Saint Philaret's second, ultimate conclusion is reserved for the Orthodox reader, where he quotes Blessed Theophan the Recluse:

“You and I should not be burdened with such concerns. Study yourself and your own sins.”

To be sure, this is sound spiritual advice. Yet, unfortunately, some of our weaker brothers and sisters cannot heed such advice.

We will not raise the question whether or not St. Philaret taught heresy in his article, not least because we reverence the Holy New

Catechumen, died without baptism, but received salvation, as described by St. Ambrose of Milan. While we concede that these are exceptional cases that do not prove the rule, so to speak, they certainly preclude any categorical objections to the contrary that baptism has been required of all persons in order to be saved. While we do not venture to say that the thief or Valentinian were saved by a “baptism of desire”, we know beyond doubt that they were saved by God’s mercy, which is infinite and ineffable, and not proscribed by the legalistic arguments of the Pharisees in our midst.

We have been witness throughout history to God’s mercy shown in many mysterious ways so that those who are inclined to good will be brought to the Truth. In the life of St. Innocent of Alaska, the Saint bears witness to a wondrous miracle. Our Saviour had sent angels to instruct and prepare the native inhabitants of the Aleutian Islands for the arrival of Russian Orthodox Christian missionaries. Having been thus prepared, the Aleuts readily converted and embraced the Orthodox Faith. So it is true that if our Saviour beholds a soul ready to receive the Truth, he can send angelic or human emissaries to enlighten them, but of course this does not preclude the infinite possibilities available to our Lord. Our Saviour may at His good pleasure choose one method for some and another method not revealed to us for the salvation of others. Perhaps in His wisdom He may choose not to send men or angels to enlighten some isolated soul found in some remote corner of the world or in some utterly godless society. Perhaps our Saviour may foresee that such a one may not be able to persevere in the Orthodox Faith on account of the great temptations faced in isolation. Perhaps our Saviour may wait to enlighten that soul at another time. WE truly do not know, nor can WE rule out the possibility without binding the hands of God. It is appropriate when we consider God’s care for our salvation that we bow in awe before His justice and His mercy.

Saint Philaret, Metropolitan of New York, opened a window for us onto God’s mercy in his article “Will the Heterodox Be Saved?”

From this it is plain to see that Metropolitan Ephraim writes of the possibility of the posthumous conversion of souls to the Orthodox Church, not the posthumous repentance of sinners.

Conversion, Repentance? Are they not both one and the same? The distinction is perhaps not obvious but must be made clear. Repentance rightly belongs to those within the Church, while conversion belongs to those outside the Church and is the means by which they are brought to the Church through Baptism and united with her. Conversion is preceded by enlightenment and an understanding of the Truth. This is accomplished by the Grace of God, in His providence and mercy (For a succinct statement of the Orthodox dogma of divine and human synergy leading from conversion to salvation, please see the *Confession* of Dositheus, Decree 3). Having come to an understanding of Truth, the newly-converted forswears his former error rooted in ignorance, and possessing the true confession of faith, passes through the laver of regeneration, unto the labor of regeneration, by which each struggles to attain salvation.

On the other hand, repentance is a mystery of the Church accomplished through confession and given benevolently to her by our all-good Saviour as a cure for sin. Once having known and understood the truth and having been united to the Church, the Orthodox Christian who subsequently sins, either through apostasy or the transgression of God’s commandments, must be restored to unity with the Church through repentance. True repentance consists of a rejection and renunciation of sins through confession, accompanied by sorrow and remorse, and manifested by acts worthy of repentance. The truly repentant sinner must resolve to “go and sin no more.”

Insofar as it has been revealed to the Church, the opportunity for Christian repentance ends at death. Our prayers offered for the souls of reposed Christians are efficacious, nonetheless, through the mercies of God. Prayer for the reposed are offered in the fervent

hope that our Saviour will forgive sins even after death, for which they cannot repent, by perfecting through grace their repentance and inclination toward God begun and cultivated in life. With similar hope, Christians are permitted to pray privately, but not in the divine services, for the souls of all mankind, living and dead, after the example of many illustrious Saints of the Church.

So, to reiterate: Conversion brings one into the Church; repentance restores to the Church one who has separated himself from her through apostasy or sin.

Such repentance is illustrated for us in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), who left his father's house, wasted his inheritance on riotous living, and having tasted the bitterness of sin, returned. This parable exactly describes the Christian who falls into sin and repents, showing also the abundant mercy of our Saviour Who does not withhold forgiveness, but runs out to meet us on our journey home. The older brother who has remained in his father's house and is angered by his father's generosity represents those of the faithful who, like the Pharisees, unjustly begrudge our Saviour's mercy to repentant sinners.

By comparison, the parable of the vineyard and the laborers (Matt. 20:1-16) teaches a different but related lesson: that our Saviour's justice is not our justice. He is free to reward those who have come at the eleventh hour as richly as He will reward those who have labored all the day long in the heat of the sun. This parable is the centerpiece of the holy St. John Chrysostom's homily delivered on Holy Pascha, and we would all do well to take it to heart.

Such repentance is also described for us in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:22-41) where St. Peter preaches to the Jews on the day of Pentecost. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, St. Peter exhorts the "men of Israel" to disavow their error, to "repent and be baptized." St. Peter preached not to the nations (pagans), but to the Jews, who had belonged to the Church of the Old Testament, and

had fallen away from her by denial and rejection of our Saviour as the Messiah of the Jews. They had once abided in the House of Israel and had sinned against God's commandments by rejecting and crucifying, in the flesh, the Lawgiver. This was not a conversion to the Truth, as they had already known the Truth, having the Law and the Prophets, as well as the preaching and miracles of our Saviour to instruct them. It was a restoration to the True Church, now transformed by our Saviour's will from the old House of Israel to the Church of the New Israel.

As concerns baptism in this regard, we confess one Baptism for the remission of sins. The Jews received baptism from the Apostles, not as a token of conversion, *per se*, but as a necessary act conjoined with their repentance, for the expiation of sins, for which the Old Law and its ritual sacrifices had been rendered ineffective. We of the nations have been taught by our Saviour, through the Apostles, that conversion and Baptism are both necessary for our salvation: Conversion, to bring us to knowledge of the Truth; Baptism, for the remission of all past sins (note we do not speak in terms of the original sin of Adam; we did not inherit his sin, nor his guilt, but his inclination to sin, which is the illness that brings death); and repentance, for the forgiveness of sins committed thereafter. We unequivocally believe and proclaim this dogma.

Nevertheless, by doing so, we do not try to constrain our Saviour's infinite mercy, by which He is absolutely free to save whomever He wills, in any manner of His choosing. We only submit ourselves to the infinitude and incomprehensibility of His mercy.

In fact, we see in the Gospel of St. Luke our Saviour's mercy exemplified by the thief on the cross who was ushered into Paradise with Christ on that very day (Luke 23:43). The thief was not baptized, nor was he suffering death as a martyr for Christ. We also acknowledge the example of Valentinian, who while yet a